

Message Text

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15

ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ADP-00 AID-20 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07

H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01

SS-15 USIA-15 OMB-01 TRSE-00 RSR-01 /130 W

----- 091301

R 150930Z AUG 73

FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9231

INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SINGAPORE 3200

E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: PFOR, SN, AS

SUBJ: AUSTRALIA-SINGAPORE: EXCHANGE OF VERBAL BRICKBATS

1. PRIME MINISTERS WHITLAM AND LEE HAVE BEEN EXCHANGING VERBAL BRICKBATS OVER PAST TEN DAYS WHICH HAVE PROVIDED SINGAPORE PRESS WITH SOME INTERESTING COPY. IT ALL SEEMED TO START WITH PM LEE IN OTTAWA CRITICIZING AUSTRALIA'S NEW IMMIGRATION POLICY WHICH HAD RECENTLY BEEN DESCRIBED HERE BY GOA IMMIGRATION MINISTER GRASSBY. LEE WAS QUOTED AS SAYING: " THE AUSTRALIANS SAY THEY WILL LET IN ASIANS, BUT IT IS PROFESSIONALLY TRAINED ASIANS THEY WANT, PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE. I THINK IT IS RATHER UNKIND. WE CANNOT AFFORD TO LOSE THEM. WE HAVE TO PULL OURSELVES UP BY OUR OWN BOOTSTRAPS." FEW DAYS LATER GRASSBY STATED IN CANBERRA THAT LEE WAS "UP THE PROVERBIAL GUM TREE IN ASSERTING HIS RECENTLY VISIT TO SINGAPORE WAS TO RECRUIT MIGRANTS." HE REPORTEDLY STRONGLY DENIED THAT AUSTRALIA DELIBERATELY ENACTED A POLICY OF RECRUITMENT OF SKILLED ASIAN WORKERS AND THAT HE WAS UNABLE TO UNDERSTAND MR. LEE'S ATTITUDE. AFTER FINAL REJOINDER BY SINGAPORE'S HEALTH AND

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HOME AFFAIRS MINISTER, CHUA, IN WHICH HE SHARPLY CON-

TRASTED AUSTRALIA'S SELECTIVE IMMIGRATION PROGRAM FOR ASIANS WITH THE PLANELOADS OF WORKING CLASS IMMIGRANTS FROM EUROPE, THIS PARTICULAR ISSUE FADED FROM LOCAL PRESS.

2. FOLLOWING SOME MINOR SKIRMISHING BETWEEN TWO PRIME MINISTERS IN OTTAWA IN WHICH LEE ACCUSED AUSTRALIA OF ONLY GIVING "TOKEN WORDS" TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF SEA AND WHITLAM ASKED WHY LEE HAD NOT SENT TROOPS TO VIET-NAM IF HE WAS SO CONCERNED WITH SECURITY IN SEA, WHITLAM LET LOOSE A BRADSIDE AGAINST LEE IN CANBERRA ON AUGUST 13. ACCORDING TO LOCAL PRESS ACCOUNTS DATED IN CANBERRA, WHITLAM DESCRIBED LEE AS A "THEORETICAL HAWK" WHO WAS "VERY FREE WITH HIS ADVICE" AND ACCUSED SINGAPORE OF PURSUING A "THOROUGHLY SELFISH ATTITUDE" IN SEA. HE REPORTEDLY DESCRIBED SINGAPORE AS THE RICHEST COUNTRY IN SEA WHICH DID NOTHING TO HELP ITS NEIGHBORS AND SAID THAT LEE HAD FOUND HIMSELF MORE AND MORE ISOLATED, NOT ONLY IN THE WORLD, BUT IN THE COMMONWEALTH.

3. TODAY'S EPISODE, WHICH WAS FRONTPAGE NEWS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE STRAITS TIMES, IS ACTING PM GOH'S REFUTATION OF WHITLAM'S STATEMENT THAT SINGAPORE IS NOT CONTRIBUTING TO REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT. GOH SAID THAT WHITLAM'S CHARGE WAS NOT ONLY UNFRIENDLY BUT ALSO UNTRUE. HE POINTED OUT THAT: "SINGAPORE'S TOTAL INVESTMENT IN MALAYSIA AND INDONESIA IS ABOUT \$360 MILLION, SURPASSING AUSTRALIA'S FIGURE OF ABOUT \$290 MILLION." SINGAPORE, HE SAID, ALSO MAKES SUBSTANTIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO REGIONAL TRAINING SCHEMES. IN THE CASE OF COLOMBO PLAN, SINGAPORE IS SECOND BIGGEST ASIAN DONOR AFTER INDIA. "IF WE TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THAT AUSTRALIA'S GNP AMOUNTED TO US\$52 BILLION (ABOUT S\$115 BILLION) IN 1972, AND SINGAPORE'S BUT A FRACTION OF IT, AT US\$3.4 BILLION (ABOUT S\$7.6 BILLION), DISPARITY IN PERFORMANCE APPEARS EVEN GREATER." GOH SAID, "WHITLAM MIGHT HAVE WANTED TO REDRESS THIS DISPARITY IN INVESTMENT BY A LAVISH INVESTMENT IN WORDS. IT IS OPEN TO HIM TO PRESENT HIMSELF AND HIS GOVERNMENT AS A FRIENDLY AND GENEROUS NEIGHBOR OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN COUNTRIES, BUT IF HE WANTS TO DENIGRATE THE EFFORTS OF OTHER COUNTRIES, HE SHOULD FIRST DO SOME RESEARCH INTO THE FACTS." "...WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT PROMPTED MR. WHITLAM TO MAKE THESE EXTRAORDINARY CHARGES IN PUBLIC," LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DR. GOH SAID.

4. COMMENT: THERE HAVE BEEN TWO OBVIOUSLY INSPIRED EDITORIALS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE PRESS IN PAST TWO DAYS HIGHLY CRITICAL OF WHITLAM'S "OUTBURST" AND "MISCHIEVOUS REMARKS." WHILE SINGAPOREANS ARE OBVIOUSLY MIFFED BY WHITLAM'S PUBLIC CRITICISM, THIS WILL PROBABLY BE CONSIDERED ONLY AS AN EXCHANGE BETWEEN FRIENDS WHO

ARE ACCUSTOMED TO SPEAKING FRANKLY WITH EACH OTHER.
UNLESS GOA DECIDES TO REFUTE DR. GOH'S FIGURES ON AID,
OR ATTEMPTS TO CLARIFY GOA'S IMMIGRATION POLICY, WHICH WE UNDER-
STAND FROM COMMENTS AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION HAS
BEEN MISINTERPRETED (PERHAPS INTENTIONALLY) BY GOS, OUR GUESS IS THAT
THIS ROUND IS OVER.
CRONK

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